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Factors responsible for the inadequate preparation for college Russian courses of many high school trained students of Russian are identified, and remedies are suggested. Attention is given to common deficiencies in high school training, minimum requirements for advanced placement, placement tests, the need to establish a standard program, and ways to promote better articulation. (AF)

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Hazards That a High-School-Trained Student of Russian Is Likely to Face in College Russian Courses

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In the short span of five years, from 1957 (when the first *sputnik* was launched by the Russians) to the beginning of the present year, a spectacular rise in high school Russian enrollment has taken place in the United States. One result of this is seen in the rapidly increasing number of high-school-trained students of Russian entering college. Many colleges and universities have not yet realized the magnitude of the problem they are likely to cope with in the near future; others are fully cognizant of it, and are making sure that it is handled efficiently and adequately.

To give us some idea of the rapid increase in the number of freshmen with high school Russian at some large universities, here are a few figures: a large Eastern university—from *none* in 1959 to *110* in 1961; another large Eastern university—from *none* in 1959 to *50* in 1962; a large Mid-Western university—from *none* in 1959 to *17* in 1962; a large university on the West Coast—from *none* in 1959 to *20* in 1962. There is as yet no noticeable increase in the number of high-school-trained students of Russian entering Southern colleges and universities.

Some of these students are sufficiently prepared for college work in Russian, while others are not. Therefore, many institutions of higher learning require all of them to take a proficiency test to determine whether they qualify for advanced placement. Such a proficiency test usually includes reading and translating a passage in Russian as well as answering questions orally in Russian. Here are some sample questions from the oral part of the proficiency test given at a large Eastern university:

1. Kak váša famílija? Kak váše ímja?
2. Gde vy živěte?
3. U.vas bol'šája sem'já?

4. U vas est' brat íli sestrá?
5. Skól'ko vam let?
6. Čto vy vídite zdes'?
7. Kudá vy sejčás idëte?
8. Gde vy býli včerá?
9. Čto vy délali včerá?
10. Čto vy búdete délat' závtra?

The answers received range from a blank, uncomprehending stare to a quick, instantaneous response. On the whole, it has been found that many high-school-trained students of Russian have a limited vocabulary and an insufficient knowledge of the essentials of Russian grammar and syntax. In this respect there is no significant difference between high school graduates in the East and those in the West, as pointed out by an instructor of Russian at one of California's leading universities:

> Our greatest difficulty with High School students of Russian is that they know certain patterns and have a certain vocabulary but are absolutely helpless when a new word is introduced or when there is a deviation from the pattern. They have difficulty in understanding Russian, because they are used to the accent of their own teacher (not always a native speaker). Those who consent to start all over and enter Russian 1 have an easy time at first but, unless they work steadily, they soon face as many obstacles as those who never had any Russian, and they often have acquired bad habits which are difficult to correct. As they have used different textbooks and methods we cannot put them together. I consider that there is an urgent need for establishing a standard program. Two years of effort in high school should not bring so much disappointment.

The person whose opinion has just been quoted prepares and administers departmental placement tests in Russian, which seems to be the rule at most university-level institutions. A few colleges and universities use the College Entrance Examination Board's Russian test, still a relative novelty.

All things considered, perhaps it would be more advantageous (and fair to incoming freshmen with training in Russian) for every university-level institution to adopt the CEEB's Russian test as the only test to be used for placement purposes. Before this could be done, however, the test in question would have to be improved and enlarged so as to include all of the so-called "minimum essentials," i.e., things that every high school graduate with any previous knowledge of Russian might reasonably be expected to know.

Many valuable suggestions concerning this all-important matter can be found in Marianna Bogojavlenskaja's article in the fall 1962

issue of *The Slavic and East European Journal*. The next step would be for the AATSEEL to set up similar (though perhaps less ambitious) minimum requirements for the advanced placement of high-school-trained students of Russian. Such requirements would of necessity have to include the following:

1. Ability to carry on simple conversation (if only by giving answers to questions) about everyday matters such as health, profession, weather, etc.
2. Reading (both silently and aloud) and understanding accented Russian texts dealing with the world of a student's everyday experience.
3. Familiarity with the basic vocabulary (about 500 words, including common idiomatic expressions) referring to the world of a student's everyday experience.
4. Ability to handle the most common Russian verbs (about 25, including the verbs of motion) in all three tenses (past, present, and future) and moods (indicative, imperative, and subjunctive, including the conditional), at least in the imperfective aspect.
5. Ability to use common Russian nouns in all the cases, both in the singular and in the plural (including some common irregular plurals).
6. Knowledge of the most common syntactic patterns in Russian (e.g., the word order in questions and direct statements).
7. Ability to read and use Russian cursive writing (words written in manuscript letters).
8. Knowledge of the basic sound patterns in spoken Russian (including intonation and meaningful sound contrasts), and ability to reproduce them in one's own speech.
9. Ability to understand simple spoken Russian (second-semester college level or higher).
10. Some familiarity with the rules of Russian spelling, punctuation, and capitalization (only when these differ from the English usage).
11. Familiarity with basic grammatical concepts, such as the noun and the verb, the subject and the predicate, the direct and indirect object, the singular and the plural, simple and compound tenses, etc. (Too much valuable time is lost in college Russian courses because of the necessity to explain these concepts to students).
12. Ability to write short compositions on everyday topics (which actually takes in Points 3-7 and 10-11, above).

An improved and enlarged CEEB Russian test, based on the above requirements, could then be used to place students with high school Russian in college Russian courses for which they are best suited. At present, advanced placement of such students is seldom effective beyond Russian 2, or the second half of the basic course (university level).

One cannot but sympathize with the ordeal through which high-school-trained students of Russian must go in their freshman year, for the hazards and obstacles faced by them in their college Russian courses are many indeed. Some of these ought to be mentioned and commented upon.

Most freshmen with high school Russian experience are unprepared for the initial shock of realizing how little Russian they know on entering college. Unless they come from a high school where the teacher gave adequate attention to the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, understanding) as regards Russian, they will soon face trouble in any but the elementary course. Many university instructors use Russian quite frequently in intermediate-level courses, especially at institutions which have adopted the audio-lingual method. They usually assume that high school graduates with previous language experience understand basic spoken Russian, which is not always the case. Furthermore, students who have taken their elementary course in college have often been exposed to tape recordings made by native or near-native Russian speakers (many colleges have language laboratories); on the other hand, high school graduates with advanced standing in Russian may have had limited opportunities to listen to similar recordings. But the biggest difficulty lies in grammar and syntax. Most students with high school Russian seem to know only two cases of nouns, both in the singular and in the plural (the Nominative and the Accusative); they confuse personal endings in verb conjugation (for example, *ja čitáet* instead of *ja čitáju);* they have only a vague concept (if any) of the vowel and consonant changes involved in declensions and conjugations; and they tend to pronounce similar-looking words alike (for example, *brat* and *brat'),* which results in confusion and misunderstanding. Some of them only know how to print in Russian, and do not realize they will be expected to use Russian cursive script in their intermediate-level college courses. Last, but not least, they often think they know more than they actually do and, consequently, they work less.

What factors are responsible for this situation, and are there any ways of correcting it?

The first factor responsible for the plight of high-school-trained students of Russian in colleges is the scant or nonexistent communication between colleges and high schools with regard to the preparation such students should have. Only a few university-level institutions seem to have succeeded in establishing some contact with the high schools from which most of their advanced students of Russian come. The remaining ones still use a hit-and-miss method in placing such students. The resulting chaos is compounded by a lack of clear understanding between high schools and colleges as to how much college credit should be given for high school training in Russian. Most university-level institutions seem to regard two years of high school Russian as the equivalent of one year of college

Russian; however, there are quite a few that equate a two-year high school Russian course with one semester of college work in the language. How is a high school graduate to know it, unless his high school teacher knows it first? If the high school teachers of Russian want to help these students, who so often have to take the basic Russian course in college after spending two years on the language in high school, they will have to find out what are the colleges' minimum standards for advanced placement in Russian, In many instances this will result in setting their own aims much higher, but such is the price of progress. If this is not done, we will continue to have—as we are now having only too frequently—a waste of time and effort in teaching Russian at the secondary school level.

There is ample evidence that the hazards a high-school-trained student of Russian faces in a college Russian course are not entirely of his own making. He is, to be sure, occasionally confused and badly advised, or has received insufficient instruction in the language. Controversial as this may sound, the second factor responsible for the plight of high school graduates with previous knowledge of Russian at a college or university is the scarcity of well-trained and competent high school teachers of Russian.

It is an open question how many high school teachers in this country are well-grounded in the essentials of Russian pronunciation, grammar, and idiomatic usage—regardless of how dedicated they are to the goal of teaching the language better and more efficiently. And yet, they must make sure that what they teach their students is correct; for, after incorrect information has been imparted to a high school student of Russian, there is little or nothing that a college instructor can do about it. The majority of high school teachers of Russian (with the exception of those who are native speakers of the language) would be well advised to take advantage of summer Russian workshops held at various universities, of NDEA fellowships, etc. As the number of adequately prepared high school teachers of Russian increases, the gap between high school and college standards of language performance will grow smaller and will ultimately disappear. For unless the high school teachers of Russian raise their sights, the advanced placement of college freshmen with two years of high school Russian will remain largely a myth.

The importance of the teacher in preparing high school students for college Russian courses can be gauged by the fact that many college Russian instructors open their interview with the student by asking him who his high school teacher of Russian was. In some states, certain high schools enjoy the reputation of sending well-prepared students of Russian to colleges; this reputation lasts as long as quality instruction in the language continues to be given at the high school in question. It would be wrong for a college instructor of Russian to assume automatically that all the incoming freshmen with high school Russian have adequate preparation in the four language skills with regard to this language; so much depends here on the competence and dedication of their high school Russian teacher.

Urgent action is needed to eliminate some of the hazards which high-school-trained students of Russian are now facing in their courses in the language at the university level. The following recommendations, the adoption of which would do much to remedy the existing situation, could conceivably be implemented by the AATSEEL in cooperation with the National Council of High School Teachers of Russian:

1. That the usefulness of a two-year high school Russian course be re-examined in the light of the negative results of the advanced placement of students in college Russian courses;
2. That a study be made of the objectives of a two-year high school course in Russian, with the aim of enlarging its scope if it is to serve as a stepping-stone to advanced Russian courses in college;
3. That, whenever possible, a strong plea be made for a four-year high school Russian course, with adequate textbooks and audio-visual aids;
4. That the 12-point set of minimum requirements for advanced placement in Russian be adopted by all colleges and accepted by all high schools (after it has been tried out on a pilot basis in at least one state);
5. That the improved and enlarged CEEB Russian test (including the listening-comprehension part) be used by colleges and universities for the advanced placement of high-school-trained students of Russian;
6. That universities in each state where Russian is taught be entrusted with the task of giving proficiency examinations to teachers of Russian before such teachers are certified to teach Russian in public schools;
7. That permanent liaison committees be established between colleges teaching Russian and their nearest high-school counterparts, to discuss all matters of mutual concern.

The implementation of these recommendations would go a long way toward eliminating some of the friction points between colleges and secondary schools with regard to Russian, and would also remove some of the obstacles to rapid progress of high-school-trained students of Russian in intermediate and advanced college courses in this language.

NOTE

This is a modified version of a paper presented at the meeting of the AATSEEL in Washington, D.C., on 27 December 1962. All the quotations and data have been taken from the replies received to a questionnaire dealing with the problems presented by high-school-trained students of Russian entering college (the questionnaire had been sent to 100 institutions of higher learning, of which fifty replied).

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